

VZCZCXYZ0021
PP RUEHWEB

DE RUEHBU #0966/01 2371429
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 251429Z AUG 09
FM AMEMBASSY BUENOS AIRES
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 4256
INFO RUCNMR/MERCOSUR COLLECTIVE
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 0374
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 1344
RUEHMO/AMEMBASSY MOSCOW 0821
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS 1522
RUEHTV/AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV 0110
RUEHDO/AMEMBASSY DOHA 0005
RUEHAM/AMEMBASSY AMMAN 0045
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 0310
RUEHUNV/USMISSION UNVIE VIENNA 0240
RUEHNO/USMISSION USNATO 0037
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC
RHEHAAA/NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL WASHINGTON DC
RHMFISS/HQ USSOUTHCOM MIAMI FL
RHMCSUU/FBI WASHINGTON DC
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC

C O N F I D E N T I A L BUENOS AIRES 000966

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/24/2024
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [PARM](#) [ETTC](#) [ENRG](#) [IR](#) [AR](#)
SUBJECT: ARGENTINA: GOVERNMENT JOINS JEWISH COMMUNITY IN
CONDEMNING IRAN'S NOMINATION OF AHMAD VAHIDI AS MINISTER OF
DEFENSE

REF: A. BUENOS AIRES 0095
[1](#)B. BUENOS AIRES 0121
[1](#)C. BUENOS AIRES 0955

Classified By: CDA Tom Kelly for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (SBU) Summary: The Government of Argentina on August 21 condemned Iranian President Ahmadinejad's August 19 nomination of Ahmad Vahidi as Minister of Defense, labeling the selection an "insult to Argentine justice and to the victims of the brutal terrorists attack against the Argentine Jewish Mutual Association." The GOA noted that Vahidi was wanted by Argentina via Interpol for his alleged role in planning and authorizing the 1994 bombing of AMIA, which left 85 dead and hundreds injured. The GOA response followed quickly on a burst of outrage from Argentine Jewish organizations and a sharp criticism from Alberto Nisman, Argentina's Special Prosecutor on the AMIA attack. Iran's response, in the press on August 24, rejected Argentine "interference in its internal affairs" and blamed Zionist propaganda for the Argentine charge; this response was reportedly repeated when the Argentine Charge d'Affaires in Tehran was convoked to the Iranian MFA on the 24th. End Summary.

[1](#)2. (SBU) The Government of Argentina (GOA) Ministry of Foreign Affairs issued a statement August 21 conveying its "most energetic condemnation" of Iran's nomination of Ahmad Vahidi as Iranian Defense Minister, noting that Vahidi was wanted by Argentine justice for his role in planning and authorizing the 1994 bombing of the Argentine Jewish Mutual Association (AMIA) in Buenos Aires. The statement further noted that Interpol at Argentina's request issued in 2007 "capture order" for Vahidi. The MFA called the nomination "an insult to Argentine justice and to the victims of the brutal terrorist attack against the Argentine Jewish Mutual Association" (AMIA). The statement closed saying that Argentina "demands again" that Iran cooperate with Argentine justice so that "those implicated may be judged in the appropriate courts."

¶3. (U) The strong government response came shortly after news of Iranian President Ahmadinejad's nomination of Vahidi sparked outraged responses from the Jewish community in Buenos Aires and a strong criticism from the Government's Special AMIA Prosecutor, Alberto Nisman. AMIA President Guillermo Borger said the organization "was surprised and indignant" at the nomination. Nisman, for his part, said it was not a surprise, because it came from a regime "that had not only failed to offer its suspects for trial," but a regime that had "protected them and given them new government jobs, albeit never at the ministerial level with such a sensitive portfolio."

¶4. (U) Iran's official response, according to the local press on August 24, blasted Argentina for "interference in the internal affairs of Iran" and attributed the Argentine statement to the "pressures, bribes and influence of the Zionist lobby." Largest-circulation daily newspaper "Clarín" ran the story under a banner headline on page one. In response, Cabinet Chief Anibal Fernandez reiterated the Argentine position August 24, saying the GOA had no desire to interfere in Iranian affairs and was simply insisting that Vahidi should be passed into Argentine custody. Wire service reports on August 25 indicated that Argentina's Charge in Tehran, Mario Quinteros, had been summoned to the Foreign Ministry, where he was told that the Argentine judicial system was defending the rights of Zionists rather than the Argentine people.⁸

Controversy Follows AMIA Anniversary

¶5. (SBU) The controversy over Vahidi's nomination came immediately on the heels of the emotional fifteenth annual commemoration of the 1994 AMIA attack, which was held on the packed street in front of the rebuilt community center on August 18 (one month after the actual anniversary of the attack). President Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner (CFK), her Chief of Cabinet Anibal Fernandez, Acting Foreign Minister Victorio Taccetti, Minister of Labor Carlos Tomada, Minister of Justice Julio Alak, and Minister of the Interior Florencio Randazzo all attended representing the government. Charge d'Affaires represented the U.S. Embassy.

¶6. (SBU) In addition to standing amidst the crowd rather than on the stage (and enduring a bit of a scrum on exiting after the event), CFK listened with apparent equanimity to a speech by a representative of the victims' families, Sergio Burstein, that mixed praise for the Government's efforts to bring Iranian suspects and local collaborators to justice with criticisms for its failure to act energetically enough. Burstein also lambasted the GOA's National Anti-discrimination Institute President, Maria Jose Lubertino, for her response to a January anti-Israel protests featuring anti-Semitic imagery led by pro-Kirchner "piquetero" social activist leader Luis D'Elia (reftels A and B). (Note: Lubertino had defended the protests on the basis of free speech, saying Israel's military operations in Gaza "violated international law, and that turned (public opinion) against them.")

¶7. (SBU) Buenos Aires Mayor Mauricio Macri (leader of the opposition PRO party), not in attendance, came in for even more heated criticism, particularly for his nomination of former National Police Commissioner Jorge Palacios as Chief of the new Buenos Aires city police force. Palacios is blamed by some in the Jewish community for allegedly helping to cover up during the first AMIA investigation the role of a confidant of former President Carlos Menem in the attack. Macri's administration was also blamed for not providing sufficient protection to prevent an anti-Semitic attack on an event at the Israeli Embassy May 17 (reftel C).

Comment

18. (C) Although the Government of Argentina has been criticized for its occasional forbearance of Iran, particularly regarding its close ties to Kirchner ally Hugo Chavez in Venezuela, in this instance the GOA reacted firmly.

The timing of the Vahidi nomination, so soon after significant press attention to the fifteenth AMIA anniversary and to the critical speeches given there, may have been an important factor in the GOA response, but the GOA statement stands on its own merit and deserves recognition.

KELLY